

Boston Nursery for Blind Babies

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The Story
of the
Boston Nursery for Blind Babies

Briefly told



147 South Huntington Avenue
120 Jamaica way
Boston

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18 Tremont Street, Boston

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*WHY and HOW the NURSERY for
BLIND BABIES was Started*



ANY years of experience as principal and teacher in the Kindergarten for the Blind impressed upon Miss Isabel Greeley and Mrs. Sarah J. Davidson the imperative need of reaching and training blind children before the age at which they came to the Kindergarten, as they had then often already contracted habits difficult to eradicate and dangerous to their mental development. Many of them also were backward on account of their previous poorly nourished physical condition. To the zeal and energy of these two devoted workers for the blind, and to the labors of a partially blind graduate of Perkins Institution, is due the credit of starting the Nursery with nothing for resources but their own faith.

This faith was rewarded, however, and January 1, 1901, in a small house at 3028 Washington Street, Roxbury, were established two blind babies—a little girl of three from the North End and a colored boy of two and a half from East Cambridge—with a matron and a maid to look after them. During that first year twenty blind babies were received, fifteen of them from the Massachusetts Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary. In July, 1901, the Nursery was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by its President, Mr. Horace G.

Allen, who has loyally served the Nursery from its beginning to date as its president and legal adviser.

A year later—1902—the Nursery moved into more commodious, though still very inadequate quarters, an old mansion house on Fort Avenue, Roxbury, where it remained for eight years, until, in February, 1910, it entered into a real home of its own, built for and adapted to its special needs. This move had been rendered necessary by the growth of the work and the unsatisfactory, even unwholesome, conditions of the old house, which was badly run down and unsuitable for the purposes of the Nursery in many ways.

The gift of a beautiful site on the Jamaica way by Mr. and Mrs. Costello C. Converse gave the impetus for this undertaking, and under the tireless and energetic leadership of the Treasurer, Mrs. Roland G. Hopkins, with the staunch support of the Blind Babies' Aid Society, the Nursery was able to enter its new building, thoroughly furnished and equipped, entirely free of debt. Soon afterward the same generous donors of the site made an additional gift of land to extend the lot from Jamaica way to South Huntington Avenue, thus putting the finishing touch on the plant.

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THE NURSERY'S NEW HOME
[*facing Jamaicaway*]

The following list of questions and answers has been compiled in response to numerous and constant inquiries:

1. Why is the Nursery a private charity?

Answer. Because the Commonwealth of Massachusetts makes no special provision for blind children under kindergarten age.

2. Why is special care necessary for blind infants?

Answer. Because they need peculiarly good physical care and special training in order to forestall feeble-mindedness.

3. Why does not the Kindergarten for the Blind, with its more than ample funds, provide this care for the infant blind?

Answer. (a) Mr. Anagnos, the Director of the Kindergarten at the time the Nursery was contemplated, declined to add this department to its work.

(b) Mr. Edward E. Allen, Mr. Anagnos' successor as Director of the Kindergarten, was consulted before the Nursery decided to build a permanent home for itself as to the wisdom of continuing the Nursery as a separate organization. He advised that the Nursery be continued in Boston as a separate institution.

4. Cannot such babies be better cared for in their own homes?



BABIES WHO MUST LEARN SELF-RELIANCE WITHOUT SIGHT

Answer. The Nursery takes only those blind babies whose parents or guardians, on account of ignorance or poverty or other home conditions, cannot properly care for them.

*How is the BOSTON NURSERY FOR
BLIND BABIES Organized?*

The Nursery was incorporated in 1901 under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The corporation consists of a president, four vice-presidents, treasurer, clerk, and board of directors. The directors appoint an executive committee of three to carry out its policies and an admission committee of three to pass on applications for admission. It also appoints each year a staff of assistants consisting of attending physician, consulting physicians, ophthalmic surgeon, orthopedic surgeon, aurist, dentist, and social service adviser, who give their services gratuitously, and employs a superintendent, who resides in the house and gives her whole time to the work.

The above constitutes the corporation of the Boston Nursery for Blind Babies, which is responsible for:

1. The policy of the Nursery.
2. The maintenance of the Home.
3. The selection of the official staff outlined above.
4. The care and investment of permanent funds.

The corporation *delegates* to the Blind Babies' Aid Society the following duties:

1. The actual oversight, by means of regularly appointed weekly visitors, of the physical condition of the children, their general development, all matters of household management, and necessary repairs on the house or grounds, concerning which they report back to the Board of Directors of the Aid Society, with such recommendations as they deem wise.

2. Raising funds for the maintenance of the Nursery, as the gifts made directly to the corporation, plus the income from invested funds, have never yet been sufficient to support the work.

Why and How the BLIND BABIES' AID SOCIETY was Organized

In 1903, in order to secure the required financial support for the Nursery, it was deemed necessary to organize the Blind Babies' Aid Society. This was done under the leadership of Mrs. Grace Coleman Lathrop, who has ever since served as its President.

The officers of the Blind Babies' Aid Society are: a president, two vice-presidents, secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer. The president, secretary, and treasurer, with three groups of seven members each, constitute the board of directors. These groups of seven members are elected one group each year in rotation.

1. What are the different memberships in the Aid Society?

Answer. There are two groups of members:

- (a) Those paying a certain sum each year, namely:

Associate Members pay \$1.00 each year

Sustaining Members pay 5.00 or more each year

Memorial Crib Members

pay 150.00 each year

- (b) Those making a single payment as follows:

Life Membership \$25.00

Memorial Life Membership 100.00

2. What does the Memorial Crib Membership provide?

Answer. The Crib Membership (\$150 a year) was established for the purpose of allowing persons interested in the infant blind the privilege of providing the food and clothes for one particular baby, who should occupy a certain crib in either the night nursery or bassinet room. To this crib is attached a brass plate bearing the name in whose memory the crib is maintained.

3. How does the Memorial *Life* Membership differ from the Memorial *Crib* Membership?

Answer. The Memorial *Life* Membership calls for a contribution of \$100 in memory of some deceased loved one, while the Memorial *Crib* Membership, also in memory of some deceased loved one, calls for a payment of \$150 *each year*.

HOW IS THE NURSERY SUPPORTED?

1. What does it cost a year to maintain the Nursery?

Answer. Approximately \$7,000 to \$8,000, according to the number of children. In 1915-16 it was \$7,357.13.

2. How much has it cost for one baby per week?

Answer. About \$5.65.

3. How is this raised?

Answer. 1. By contributions to the Nursery.

2. By income from invested funds from legacies. For actual figures see annual report printed each year.

3. By Blind Babies' Aid Society memberships. See list of memberships above.

4. By board of infants. Whenever possible, the Nursery insists upon parents paying some sum weekly or monthly, however small. The state pays from \$2 to \$2.75 for a state minor ward, according to age.

5. By proceeds of special efforts, managed and directed by the board of directors of the Blind Babies' Aid Society, such as fairs, concerts, special appeals, etc.

4. Does the Nursery employ solicitors?

Answer. *The Nursery has never employed solicitors.*

5. Has the Nursery any connection with the International Sunshine Society?

Answer. *None whatever.*

What is the SPECIFIC WORK of the Nursery?

1. Is it a day nursery?

Answer. No. It provides a home night and day for such length of time as is necessary, varying from a few weeks to four or five years.

2. What care and training do the babies receive?

Answer. Physical up-building, hygienic surroundings, physicians' and surgeons' treatment when necessary, training in personal hygiene and character building, including cleanliness, obedience, self-reliance, etc.

3. What is the supreme need of a blind baby?

Answer. Intelligent and sympathetic understanding of the baby's individual needs.

4. Can the Nursery supply this need?

Answer. It can and does to a remarkable extent.

5. How is this possible?

Answer. Because the capacity is limited to twenty-five for this very purpose, in order that the superintendent may come into close personal contact with every baby.

6. What is expected of a child who has been prepared in the Nursery for the Kindergarten?

Answer. That he should be able at least to dress and undress himself and feed himself neatly.

7. Do all the children who leave the Nursery go to the Kindergarten?

Answer. The large majority of them do. All *totally blind* children do who are otherwise normal.

8. What happens to those who are not totally blind when they leave the Nursery?

Answer. There are two groups:

(a) A few have sufficient vision to enter a public school where special training is offered them.

(b) Many who suffer from phlyctenular keratitis (tuberculosis of the eye) come to us for a few weeks or months for care and treatment, and go home cured.

9. What do phlyctenular keratitis cases require?

Answer. The same abundant nourishment, fresh air, sunshine, and general up-building that all cases of tuberculosis require, plus the necessary treatment of the eyes.

10. Does the Nursery have facilities for operations?

Answer. Yes. The Nursery has a fully equipped operating room.

11. Does the Nursery care for feeble-minded blind babies?

Answer. If feeble-mindedness is fully established, no. Whenever a doubt exists, every effort is made to stimulate mental development. If this fails, the child is transferred elsewhere.

12. Is it dangerous to care for both normal and feeble-minded blind babies in one small home?

Answer. Experience has proved beyond question that it endangers the mentality of the normal-minded babies.



LITTLE CHILDREN — WHO, THOUGH BLIND, ARE LEARNING INDEPENDENCE

Miscellaneous Questions

1. How may admission to the Nursery be obtained for a blind baby?

Answer. By application to the superintendent, giving complete history and home conditions of the baby, and filling out a blank supplied therefor.

2. From what sources do most of the babies come?

Answer. From the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, Massachusetts Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary, Boston Dispensary, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Associated Charities, Boston Floating Hospital, and from states where there is no provision for blind babies.

3. Why are there so often vacancies in the Nursery?

Answer. Because several beds are reserved for the cases of phlyctenular keratitis described above.

4. What are some of the most common causes of blindness in infants?

Answer. Ophthalmia neonatorum, or blindness caused by infection at birth, curable if properly treated in time, and congenital cataract.

5. What per cent of cases are due to ophthalmia neonatorum?

Answer. Formerly about sixty per cent. The splendid work of the Massachusetts Committee for Prevention of Blindness in securing legislation and in education of the public on this subject has greatly lowered this percentage.

6. Which cases of blindness from the above-mentioned causes are curable?

Answer. That depends largely on the progress of the disease when the child reaches the Nursery.

7. What per cent are helped by treatment?

Answer. All are helped. Partial vision is often restored, total vision occasionally, and nearly all cases of phlyctenular keratitis are discharged cured.

8. Do the physicians and surgeons on the staff serve gratuitously? *Answer.* Yes.

Relation of Nursery to Other Organizations

1. What do other organizations think of the Nursery? *Answer.* The Nursery works in co-operation with the Kindergarten for the Blind, the Perkins Institution for the Blind, and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, by whom its work is heartily commended. See sixth report of the Commission for the Blind, 1913: "The most satisfactory piece of preventive work has been, perhaps, the cases of little children sent to the Boston Nursery for Blind Babies to convalesce from phlyctenular disease."

The Blind Babies' Aid Society

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[Mrs. H. N.] Grace Coleman Lathrop

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